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MASTER'S PROJECT: CULTIVATING LIBERATORY LEARNING SPACES THROUGH RACIAL EQUITY COACHING & FACILITATION

Marissa R. Barbieri
The University of Vermont

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MASTER'S PROJECT: CULTIVATING LIBERATORY LEARNING SPACES THROUGH RACIAL
EQUITY COACHING & FACILITATION

A Capstone Project Presented

by

Marissa Rose Barbieri

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Professional Studies
Specializing in Leadership for Sustainability

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Committee:

Heather Laine Talley, Ph.D., Coach

Matt Kolan, Ph.D., Capstone Leadership Team

ABSTRACT

In the 2019-2020 school year, the Vermont Principals' Association convened school leaders for a two-year-long exploration of educational equity. Year one of the initiative included individual and peer group coaching as a key support and space for inquiry. I acted as Lead Coach, providing coaching to eight practitioners - principals, a counselor, a classroom teacher, and a Director of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. Throughout this engagement, I tracked the practices that enable educators to examine and disrupt whiteness as it operates within ourselves, our relationships, and our schools. This paper explores the elements of racial equity coaching and facilitation that help create the conditions for white educators to examine and disrupt white supremacy culture in their practice without the emotional labor of and harm to Black Indigenous People of Color?

(See <https://bit.ly/38Hkj0a> for a 10-minute video overview of this Capstone, starting at 5:45)

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INTRODUCTION

I've lived in Vermont my whole life, and I've been white my whole life. From an early age, I could articulate many facets of Vermont culture - from our foodways to our linguistic quirks - but white culture was something I wasn't even conscious of until well into my twenties. For all its liberal cache, Vermont's collective racial identity is fueled largely by what Subini Annamma (2017) calls "race evasiveness," a non-ableist term for what was once termed "colorblindness." In the school system, calls to talk about racial equity are commonly dismissed with population statistics; the low number of nonwhite students, some argue, makes talking about race unnecessary. And yet.

Let us pause to consider the consequences of reducing "statistically insignificant" populations to an asterisk in our data, and appreciate the universe of experience that asterisk contains. For far too long, antiracist work in Vermont schools has relied on the emotional labor of students of color, asking them again and again to perform their oppression for educators and administrators who claim to not know how to help otherwise. "Some may argue that school is not an appropriate place for racial socialization," write Ali Michael and Eleonora Bartoli in "What White Children Need to Know About Race" (2014).

This view assumes that it is possible to maintain racial neutrality in schools. In fact, the neutral/color-blind approach that most schools currently use does racially socialize youth - it simply does so in a particular direction. As stated earlier, silence is a racial message and a 'tool of whiteness.' In order to support the goals of their diversity mission statements and work toward a 'racially just America,' schools need to take a more proactive approach to teaching white students about race and racial identity. (p. 2)

In other words, white adults responsible for children's learning and wellbeing must cultivate the capacity to put our privilege on the line in service to racial equity. In the context of Vermont's whiteness and what equity requires, I ask: How, in my work as a coach and facilitator of white educators, can I help create the conditions to learn about whiteness without the emotional labor of and harm to Black Indigenous People of Color?

In the 2019-2020 school year, the Vermont Principals' Association piloted the Equity Practitioners Network (EPN), convening school leaders for a two-year-long exploration of educational equity. The Association's partner in this project, WholeHeart, Inc., advocated for individual and peer group coaching as an integral support, recognizing that "Because the insidious nature of racism shapes individuals' unconscious beliefs and values, educators must first develop critical awareness of race and racism at the personal level before endeavoring to effectively address racial disparities in the institutionalized school setting." (Baglyos, 2017 p.17). WholeHeart recruited five coaches - myself among them - based on our experience with both equity work and coaching and facilitation. I acted as Lead Coach, collaborating with WholeHeart's Holly Wilkinson in supporting the other coaches, while providing coaching to eight practitioners - principals, a counselor, a classroom teacher, and a Director of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. Throughout this engagement, I tracked the practices that enable educators to examine and disrupt whiteness as it operates within ourselves, our relationships, and our schools.

METHODS

My approach to coaching and facilitation is largely informed and inspired by the School Reform Initiative (SRI) and YES! Jams. (More on my facilitation and coaching journey in Appendix A.) SRI offers myriad Protocols, conversational structures intended for ongoing Reflective Learning Communities (aka Communities of Practice, Professional Learning Communities, etc.), while Jams model holding space for transformation at the intersection of the personal, interpersonal, and systemic. Jams are rooted in relationship and the spirit of welcome and invitation at the heart of my work as a white person talking with other white people about race. SRI and Jam practices of welcome, grounding in agreements, check-ins, and reflection(s) are reflected in the agendas for all practitioner and coaches meetings (Appendix B).

The 100 Million Healthier Lives Touchstones for Collaboration (Appendix C) - a gift of WholeHeart's previous coaching work - articulated our shared agreements for our time together, a practice also common in SRI and Jam space. The Touchstones were introduced at our first meeting with practitioners and the Core Touchstones identified by coaches were reiterated in each successive meeting. Both these Touchstones and Jones and Okun's "Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture" (2001) became a shared shorthand across conversations, with practitioners and coaches alike naming places where they were evident - or not - at the personal, interpersonal, and systemic levels of each of our respective practices. The use of metaphors was also critical in helping develop shared understanding, yielding some that are particularly potent in equity work (Appendix D). Throughout the year, practitioners and coaches practiced asking probing questions, drawing on SRI's "Pocket Guide to Probing Questions" (n.d.) for guidance. These elements intertwined to help each

of us create the conditions for ever-deepening exploration of equity on a personal level, with the youth and/or adults whose learning we steward, and in our efforts to shift systemic inequity (see Appendix E for my methodology in tracking these elements).

RESULTS

I set out to catalog the practices that support and sustain an authentic, relational, transparent, and responsive approach to equity professional learning in predominantly white space. Upon reflection, I saw that many of these practices operate in generative tension with the characteristics of white supremacy culture articulated by Jones and Okun (2001). The Touchstone “Make the way we work together an example of what’s possible” was one I returned to again and again throughout the year, made manifest through the shared exploration with practitioners and coaches of what’s possible outside of the characteristics of white supremacy culture.

Practices for Cultivating Liberatory Learning Spaces (See Appendix F for an expanded exploration of this table’s contents)	
Where White Supremacy Culture normalizes...	Instead seek to embrace...
Sense of Urgency	<p><i>Welcome</i> to all emotions present, and to the slowness necessary to sit with them and let them move through us.</p> <p><i>Grounding</i> in place, in our bodies, and in community. Intentionally grounding in every conversation is not a waste of time, but a prerequisite to full presence in our time together.</p>

	<i>Breath</i> as a means of grounding, of moving emotion through our bodies, and creating a shared container. "Conspire" comes from the same root word as "respiration." Those we breathe with are, quite literally, our co-conspirators.
Quantity Over Quality	<i>Openness, Slowness, and Space</i> , as a practice in our agendas and as an internal condition to cultivate within ourselves.
Perfectionism	<i>Celebration</i> of successes <i>and</i> stumblings, engaging with both reflectively.
Defensiveness	<p><i>Vulnerability</i>, as an entrypoint to and keystone of the work.</p> <p><i>Humor</i>, both as a means of release and as a teaching tool. Allowing space for humor helps diffuse tension and enables vulnerability to share, learn, and grow from our mistakes.</p>
Paternalism	<i>Curiosity Over Certainty</i> , as an internal condition to cultivate and as a practice we embody through deep listening.
Power Hoarding	<i>Transparency</i> in our thinking, planning, and

	acting whenever possible (with the gentle suggestion that it is always possible).
Objectivity	<i>Check-ins</i> , coupled with <i>Generous Listening</i> , as a way of understanding and honoring everyone's point of view.
Individualism	<i>Generous Listening</i> that honors our interdependence.
Worship of the Written Word	<i>Multiple Modalities</i> , and <i>(Other) Voices</i> including poetry or quotes at the close - and sometimes open - of each meeting, in our content and in our invitations to connect.
Either/Or Thinking	<p><i>Systems Thinking</i> that complexifies and troubles the binary, recognizes intersectionality, and embraces incommensurability.</p> <p><i>Emergence</i> as a means of appreciating the fractal reflection of complexity in seemingly simple interactions.</p>
Right to Comfort	<i>Invitation with Reflection</i> , establishing all conversations as "challenge by choice," with a further invitation to interrogate the

	source of resistance to or declination of the challenge.
Fear of Open Conflict	<i>The Zones of Comfort, Stretch, & Panic</i> and <i>The Compass of Reactions</i> (Appendix G) as a shared language and framework for acknowledging when we enter panic and working with the reactions we may experience there.
Progress is Bigger, More	<i>Frameworks</i> of Helms' "White Racial Identity Development Model" (1995), Harro's "Cycle of Liberation" (2013, Appendix H), and the Spiral Mountain metaphor (Appendix D) that highlight the cyclical, nonlinear, iterative nature of our equity journey.

Additionally, a robust resource list (Appendix I) emerged over the course of the year, alongside some powerful unintended results (Appendix J).

EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT

Practitioners' curiosity is evidenced by the questions they're asking of me and of themselves, by the frameworks they're applying, through their interactions with faculty and families, and in the policies they create and uphold. I am grateful for every time they asked me, their peers, or themselves "Whose voices am I missing?" and buoyed up by every heartfelt request to "please push back on my thinking here." At the midpoint and end of the school year, practitioners were asked to reflect on their experience of coaching via Google Form. Each respondent named the necessity of coaching as a companion to deep learning, particularly for school leaders. "I enjoyed being able to simply talk through what I was working on and learning," one wrote, "That was not possible in any other venue." The value of the peer group coaching was underscored, reinforcing the power of interdependence in shared learning: "The group coaching keeps me sane!" wrote another, "I am 'forced' to keep what I am learning fresh because I play a part in this group. I count on them and they count on me! I am learning to be more open and honest. I value the opinions and advice they give and the laughs that we have."

Having framed my inquiry around cultivating curiosity, it was heartening to see I'd struck a fruitful balance between listening and probing. "I love the 1:1 coaching," wrote one practitioner, "It has been key for me. I have learned a lot through the question and answer approach. The opportunity to dive deep and self reflect has been critical. I have gained new resources, learned a lot about myself, and have been encouraged to be critical of the work in ways that bring me further forward." The impact of the core practices and Touchstones is reflected in practitioners' naming them both as effective elements of my coaching and as internalized approaches to their own equity journey. "One-on-coaching has been

incredible," wrote another, "I feel very supported and yet challenged, each time we talk. My coach pushes my thinking and often leads me to consider things I hadn't previously - including successes that may feel like mini failures or stumbling blocks."

Practitioners' feedback - along with every conversation we shared, individually or as a team - reflect their embrace of centering curiosity over certainty and listening as a gift, emphasizing again and again the undeniable power of shared study. Their equity learning and embodied equity practice intertwine in a reinforcing loop, further troubling the characteristics of white supremacy culture with every iteration.

RECOMMENDATIONS/NEXT STEPS/KEY LEARNINGS

The work of deprivatizing educator practice is no small undertaking, particularly when unpacking race. Racial equity coaching asks practitioners to open the doors of their classrooms and schools, inviting vulnerability about not just their professional role but their biases, beliefs, and habits. It is in many ways deeply countercultural. Conventional notions of leadership insist that the person “in charge” knows more than anyone else in the room and can mitigate strongly against leaders’ adoption of a learner stance. White supremacy culture’s frantic urgency threatens at every turn to overtake the slowness necessary to take right action, in right relationship, particularly when the pace of change in schools can already feel so glacial. Both one-on-one and peer coaching gave practitioners an opportunity to be learners *while* leading, holding the space to reflect while acting, in perpetual movement through Bobbie Harro’s “Cycle of Liberation” (2013 and Appendix H).

This experience only strengthened my trust in coaching and facilitation as humanizing and liberatory practices and my belief in its necessity for true systemic transformation, in schools and beyond. The work enabled practitioners and coaches alike to see inequities we may never have seen before, and our shared reflection in community prevented us from ever *unseeing* them. While at times overwhelming, that awareness also invites structures, community, and loving accountability that support continuous engagement on the personal, interpersonal, and systemic levels. As insidious as white supremacy culture is, it offers just as many entry points to its dismantling; as white people, we must seize each of those opportunities for change and, as predominantly white institutions, create the conditions to leverage our privilege for change. Particularly in public schools, our most prominent community centers and sites of cultural reproduction, I am heartened by the

myriad opportunities we have to intervene, disrupt, and transform our relationship to race, and to ourselves.

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APPENDIX A: My Coaching Story & Commitments

The story of my facilitation and coaching journey thus far is largely one of reckoning with my complicity in forces of domination and oppression. In my second year of AmeriCorps*VISTA service, I was trained as what was then known as a Critical Friends Group Coach by what is now known as the School Reform Initiative. CFGs then were based almost entirely on the vast library of Protocols developed in the field by educators as a means to structure conversations about teaching and learning. The work of deprivatizing educator practice is Herculean (if not Sisyphean), yet it was my charge as a 21-year-old VISTA to convince schools around the state to do just that. With no teaching experience and only a marginally-relevant degree in English and Philosophy under my belt, my zealous belief in Protocols was born in no small part from the protection they offered from my own incompetence. The structures allowed me to remain detached from both the content of and the participants in our conversations, intimidated as I was by both. As such, I can in retrospect recognize my practice as a dehumanizing one, sacrificing relationship and authentic connection in favor of predetermined outcomes, eschewing adaptability and responsiveness in favor of The Process.

In those early days, I labored long and hard under the myth of objectivity, believing that “holding space” meant holding myself at arm’s length from those I ostensibly lead, unaware of the hierarchy I fostered in so doing. I remember so clearly reading Jones and Okun’s “The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture” for the first time and the shock of seeing so many of my facilitation and coaching “best practices” staring back at me: a manifestation of urgency in my relationship to and with time, a worship of the written word in my strict adherence to Protocol, and the either/or thinking I still work so hard to disrupt. I was more

than a decade into the work at that point and more than momentarily chagrined at the realization before coming to understand it for the true gift it offered. I remember a similar experience at the School Reform Initiative's annual meeting some years ago, when a fellow affiliate hung a list of conventional "Agreements" (what some refer to as "Norms", or even more prescriptively "Ground Rules") on the wall and systematically broke down how each of them centered whiteness and replicated harm against already marginalized participants. My relationship with the notion of "safe space" has never been the same since.

Working in the field of education (and, as I reflect further, in my life at large), I've always felt part of my responsibility is to leverage my privilege to help elevate voices that are missing - seldom "absent" in the passive sense, more often absented by implicit and explicit messaging about who gets to speak and how those who speak are (not) listened to. In conversations with adults, that has meant always (re)centering student voice; when I moved into the realm of philanthropy, it was the voices of grantees, primarily educators and organizers working directly with youth. In my life in Vermont at large, it's an active remembering to engage with the limitations of my perception as a white person in a predominantly white state. In all cases, I've learned the work is not to speak for others, but rather to cede my time and resources in favor of increased opportunities for marginalized peoples to speak for themselves. This has felt like a particular point of discernment in a time of such rampant virtue-signaling, when the impulse to prove my worth as an ally (or my non-racist-ness as a white person) by any means necessary can lead to replicated harm of its own.

As my work has come to focus more and more pointedly on racial equity, my efforts to decouple my practice from white supremacy culture has been (at least) twofold. Expanding the field of voices contributing to our shared understanding and redistributing that narrative

privilege in favor of perspectives invisibilized by kyriarchy has to be paired with an examination of how that invisibilization is perpetuated. For me, I must then explicitly name my white perspectives and ways of knowing as such, not merely defaulting to notions of “the objective truth” or “the way things are.” To be sure, this is a monumental task in itself, the dominance of white supremacy culture having been so invisibilized to and for white people that making it explicit is akin to talking to the fish who asks “What’s water?” Engaging in such conversations in Vermont presents its own challenges, our predominant whiteness further burdened by an espoused legacy of liberal good intentions that’s central to the dominant narrative of our state’s identity. How could we have racism, white residents seem to protest, when we don’t have people of color? How could we perpetuate oppression when we have Bernie?!

As seems to be inherent to the recursive nature of the MLS program, my project about supporting others in unlearning whiteness calls me to unlearn my own again and again. One reason I understand Vermonter’s pushback to racial equity conversations, after all, is because I’ve internalized those messages myself so deeply, from such a young age. I must then embrace my own actions not just as a reflection of but as a means towards the change I know is necessary. I think of Emergent Strategy’s insights into the fractal nature of change, and my favorite of the Touchstones of my Capstone coaching work this year, “Make the way we work together an example of what’s possible”. How can I then make the way that I be, as Dr. Sayra Pinto would say, an example of what’s possible - and what I’ve come to believe even more firmly is necessary - in the work of antiracism? To stay relational, to stay fluid, to stay in resistance to the characteristics of white supremacy culture and their powerful pull towards disembodied, disparate, and discrete changes - “Check out our meticulously wordsmithed Equity Statement!” - over the beautiful ever-unfolding mess of transformation.

My Capstone exploration - and all of the beings through whom it has been made possible - has offered me so many gifts of how to be in relationship, with self, with other(s), and with systems. Those ways of being are in constant conversation with the Creating Conditions work of our first year, which called me not just to name the practices that cultivate the internal conditions necessary for my thriving, but also to explicitly name and claim that with which I seek to be in alignment, towards what future I am orienting myself. While white supremacy culture seeks to uphold hierarchy and expertism, my leadership practice is one of curiosity over certainty, perhaps never more evident than in my racial equity journey. It is one that, as a white person, necessitates a lifetime of learning and unlearning, directly contradicting white supremacy culture notions of perfectionism and linear progress. My facilitation and coaching practice disrupts that dynamic by making my learning visible, celebrating the wisdom in the room, and ensuring all voices are invited to contribute from wherever they're at in their (un)learning. Both Helms' "White Racial Identity Development Model" and Harro's "Cycle of Liberation" remind us that this work is cyclical and nonlinear, and I am committed to a recursive return to the provocations of this work throughout the course of my life.

My Commitments as a Facilitator & Coach:

Confidentiality

What is shared by participants in the professional learning community and in coaching conversations will be held in the strictest confidence.

Transparency

At any time, the facilitator/coach will endeavor to explain - and participants are invited to ask about - the "Why?" of our ways of working together.

Emergence

Our engagement will be shaped by and responsive to the strengths, needs, and curiosities of the professional learning community.

Differentiation

Emergence necessitates myriad opportunities for participants to discern which approaches to entering into, experiencing, and reflecting on this work best serve them.

Collaboration & Co-Construction

None of us can or should do this work alone, myself included! Collaboration and co-construction with other content providers, coaches, and facilitators - as well as interested staff - is foundational to my approach and commitment to providing multiple entry points to the work.

Love

Recognizing that "All of our work is grief work" (Heather Laine Talley), we center right relationship as fundamental to personal, interpersonal, and systemic transformation.

APPENDIX B: Coaching & Coaches' Call Agendas

Adapted in part from those developed by WholeHeart, Inc., in their engagement with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health Policy Fellows

Herein you will find sample agendas for:

60-minute One-on-One Monthly Practitioner Coaching Call

Normally conducted via Zoom and scheduled through Calendly on a monthly basis.

90-minute Practitioner Peer Group Quarterly Coaching Call

Dates for all of these calls were scheduled at the initial in-person Equity Practitioners Network gathering at the start of the school year, so that they might live in folks' calendars. While the closure of Vermont schools on March 18th led to some rescheduling and cancellations, for the most part these dates remained the same. Thankfully, they were all initially scheduled to take place via Zoom, so were not impacted by the shift to physical-distancing.

90-minute Monthly Coaches' Call Agenda

Conducted by Zoom, primarily facilitated by Holly Wilkinson of WholeHeart, with whom I would meet beforehand to plan.

As adrienne maree brown quotes (unattributed), "What we give our attention to grows," and the spaciousness in these agendas is a reflection of the spaciousness necessary - in our conversations and within ourselves - for white people to give our attention to the sticky

parts of our equity journeys. Our timing reflects the Jam principle of Welcome, inviting all emotions, reactions, and wonderings, and a commitment to the generous listening central to WholeHeart and SRI's practices. We are here, as my friend and fellow SRI Affiliate Daniel Baron says, "to listen one another into our deeper understanding."

60-minute One-on-One Monthly Practitioner Coaching Call

These calls are based on listening, asking questions that open & expand, and love as social and cultural value. Why love? "The intention to walk through the world practicing love across relationships and encounters feels like a great frontier. On the future of my ability to make this move, our ability to make this move together, I have more questions than answers. But good questions, generously posed, seriously held, are powerful things." Krista Tippet, *Becoming Wise, An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living*

Agenda

5 minutes Arrival & Welcome

Where we're both coming from today - what's alive personally & professionally?

5 minutes Setting the Table Together

Read the four core Touchstones:

When the going gets rough, suspend judgment and get curious. Ask questions to understand another's perspectives and what your reaction teaches you about yourself and your learning edges.

Listen generously to each other. Trust that we all hold a piece of the puzzle and we need each other's pieces to understand the whole picture.

Respect confidentiality. Safety is built in when we can trust that our words and stories will remain with the people with whom we choose to share, and are not repeated to others without our permission.

Make the way we work together *an example of what's possible.*

40 minutes Explore an Equity Literacy Ability

- *What have you been recognizing?*
- *What's getting in your way?*
- *Where's your learning edge?*

10 minutes Closing

What are you taking with you from the call?

What resources &/or relationships could support you at this point in your equity journey?

This is not a test or report on how good we are, but where we can grow and deepen our understanding. As Robin Diangelo says, "I try and point the finger inward, not outward."

90-minute Practitioner Peer Group Quarterly Coaching Call

5 minutes Welcome & Intention

What is the purpose of our time together?

10 minutes Brief Check-ins

Where are you calling from and what's one thing that has your attention today?

5 minutes Setting the Table Together

Read the four core Touchstones:

When the going gets rough, suspend judgment and get curious. Ask questions to understand another's perspectives and what your reaction teaches you about yourself and your learning edges.

Listen generously to each other. Trust that we all hold a piece of the puzzle and we need each other's pieces to understand the whole picture.

Respect confidentiality. Safety is built in when we can trust that our words and stories will remain with the people with whom we choose to share, and are not repeated to others without our permission.

Make the way we work together *an example of what's possible.*

40 minutes Peer Reflection

Timed rounds of 5-7 minutes per person to share learning edges and, if wanted, solicit feedback, advice, and/or reflections from the group.

5 minutes Closing

All are invited to offer any reflections and/or share one thing they're taking away from the call.

5 minutes Closing Poem (see Appendix I for some examples)

90-minute Monthly Coaches' Call Agenda

5 minutes Welcome

15 minutes Setting the Table Together

*Where are you coming from today? What are you noticing around you & within you?
(modeling the Touchstone "Make the way we work together an example of what's possible.")*

15 minutes Logistics Check-in

What's working & what's getting in your way?

40 minutes Reflection

Timed rounds of 8 minutes per person, your time to reflect, request, and take a deeper dive into the practice & tension of the edges where listening and equity meet. Some possible prompts:

- *What's been working?*
- *What questions are you holding?*
- *What would support you in your practice of expansive listening as a coach?*

10 minutes Check-out

What's one thing you're taking away with you from the call?

5 minutes Closing Poem

APPENDIX C: 100 Million Healthier Lives Touchstones for Collaboration

Italics indicate the four Core Touchstones EPN coaches identified to be revisited during each coaching call

- Be present as fully as possible. Speak your truth from your heart and mind.
- *Listen generously to each other's truths. Trust that we all hold a piece of the puzzle and we need each other's pieces to understand the whole picture.*
- Embrace differences and be open to learning from each other.
- *When the going gets rough, suspend judgment and get curious. Be quick to forgive and ask open questions to understand.*
- Honor each other's learning and resourcefulness. Trust we each will learn and contribute in our own way, that there is no need to "fix" each other.
- Make space to pause and reflect to deepen our thinking.
- Be willing to have meaningful conflict to create unprecedented goals and solutions. When needed, seek council for help with conflicts.
- Allow your ideas to be developed further by others.
- Seek common ground. When we can't fully agree, commit to a unified decision and see what happens with a humble posture of learning. If we have made the wrong turn, we will discover it together and turn the right way together.
- Accept that we will sometimes fail, but we will learn together and move forward.
- Help each other to have the confidence to spread our wings, be creative, and take on new roles.
- Balance our yearning for change with patience for the process of change and growth.

- *Respect confidentiality. Safety is built in when we can trust that our words and stories will remain with the people with whom we choose to share, and are not repeated to others without our permission.*
- *Make the way we work together an example of what's possible.*

APPENDIX D: Metaphors

I've found the following metaphors - which I've gathered and/or developed in my own learning process - particularly supportive in helping practitioners, coaches, and myself make sense of our equity journey(s).

Woke Mountain

We understand that we are all learners in this work, and that engaging in an exploration of white privilege and its many expressions is a lifelong commitment. We understand power hoarding, perfectionism, and the notion of expertism to be further manifestations of white supremacy culture and, as such, reject them. We invite and celebrate lived experience and the multiple ways of knowing among us, while embracing the fact that no amount of learning and unlearning results in any one of us standing triumphant atop Woke Mountain. Ours is a nonlinear journey and an opportunity best shared collectively.

The Spiral Mountain (a gift from Rushford Family Chiropractic)

We can sometimes think, especially as white people, that our equity learning journey should be a linear one (as we work to summit Woke Mountain) and that moments when we're called to return to a particular past learning - which is to say, when we screw up - are an indicator of our failure to learn. In those moments when it feels like we're returning to some old place - maybe even the place where we started - the metaphor of the Spiral Mountain asks us to envision our journey not as a vertical climb, but instead as a spiral path. Though it may feel like we're retreading familiar territory, we must remember that we're encountering it from a new elevation, with new understandings, relationships, and strategies that offer new perspectives and thus new opportunities for growth.

(Re)Learning How to Climb Stairs

White supremacy culture can at times feel so pervasive that the task of unlearning it feels hopelessly daunting. I offer that, though it is a monumental task, it's not one of unlearning something we do automatically, like breathing, but rather something that was taught to us (albeit largely implicitly), like climbing stairs. Having had two major hip surgeries, and an attendant need to (re)learn how to climb stairs after each, I assure you it *can* be done!

Dipping a Cup in the River (a gift from Austin Willacy, YES Jam facilitant extraordinaire)

When we think about check-ins - no matter how long they might be - we can be challenged by many of the forces of white supremacy culture, particularly perfectionism and urgency. The impulse can be to get it "right", right now. However, when reflecting on the river of your experience, the invitation is not to map the river, but rather to dip a cup in and see what comes out. Ask, "What is alive for me in this moment?" and trust that whatever emerges is enough.

APPENDIX E: Characteristics/Elements Wall Chart

See below for my initial analog exploration of the relationship between Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun's "The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture" (smaller yellow-green sticky notes) and the practices, frameworks, metaphors and internal conditions (see Key in the upper left) at the heart of this Capstone. I reference (slash live and breathe) the characteristics so persistently that I joke I should get a Jones & Okun tattoo, but the core elements sticky notes lived on my wall for weeks before I began to grok the connection between the two. I'm grateful for the MLS Capstone Report writing process for helping to unlock that insight!



APPENDIX F: A Further Exploration of the Practices for Cultivating Liberatory Learning Spaces

This Appendix offers an expansion on the table found on page 8, with headings below corresponding to the exploration that follows.

Welcome, Grounding, Breath, and Openness, Slowness, and Space

Working life in the United States is largely driven by the twinned forces of a *Sense of Urgency* and an obsession with *Quantity Over Quality*. Together, they foster a cult of busyness that seems at times to link our worth directly to our ability to produce, and to the stress level reached in that pursuit. This is particularly true in schools, where ever-widening responsibilities for young people's health and welfare - on top of learning needs - run headlong into ever-narrowing opportunities for educators to learn, reflect, collaborate. The Equity Practitioners Network subverted that paradigm by carving out intentional time for school leaders to do just that. As coaches, we had the great privilege of creating the primary container for reflection and collaboration, and seized the opportunity to offer as much *Openness, Slowness, and Space* as our time with practitioners would allow.

In the broadest of strokes, this was made manifest in agendas where the "content" was entirely practitioner-generated, with uninterrupted chunks of time for them to use as they felt would be of service - by being listened to, by being responded to, or merely by inviting resources on a particular topic. In order to create the conditions for practitioners to discern what was of service, we began by *Grounding* in place, in our bodies, and in community. We would share *Breath*, and, borrowing a Jam tradition, offer *Welcome* to every part of the practitioners present, paying particular attention to the universe of emotions that can come up in equity work, sometimes unbidden, and sometimes in rapid succession. This practice rejects the notions of hierarchy and expertism by welcoming all parts of the equity journey

as valid and necessary. Creating the conditions to allow ourselves to feel each of those feelings without attachment, and to hold each other in those feelings without judgement, was foundational to our collective care.

Leveraging my privilege as the facilitator to embody and model this practice meant first and foremost slowing down my own admittedly urgency-driven pace. In order to truly ground and invite breath with my practitioners, I needed to do the same myself, before even signing down to Zoom. Even under the best of circumstances, practitioners would come flying in at the end of a predictably stressful work day; by the last quarter of the year, that stress was immeasurably compounded by a global pandemic and attendant school closure. Our work with the Compass of Reactions (Appendix G) helped me to anticipate and recognize some of the stress responses that might show up, while my own centering practices served me well in not reacting to and from stress myself. Sometimes just taking a deep breath once everyone logged on and, before moving into check-ins, inviting a moment of silence in the cacophony of crisis felt like such a gift.

Celebration

The characteristic of *Perfectionism* poses perhaps the greatest challenge to deprivatizing practice and inviting public learning, particularly around spicy topics such as race.

Perfectionism demands that we only get things right, while fear of being “wrong” can keep us toggling frantically between the Comfort and Panic Zones (see Appendix G). This can - and perhaps most frequently does - look like silence and an inability to even begin to engage. Perfectionism can convince me that not knowing where to start means I shouldn’t start at all. Knowing that learning and transformation can only happen in the Stretch Zone, however, means seeking out every opportunity for *Celebration* - even (especially) of our flubbed starts and the efforts that can seem too small, particularly as we grow our capacity

to recognize inequity. Its prevalence, while daunting, can also be seen as an abundance of opportunities for change, each of which we must strive to leverage and celebrate.

Vulnerability and Humor

Celebration can also function to break down some of the *Defensiveness* that shows up in learning spaces, fueled as it is by the binary notions of right and wrong reinforced by perfectionism. I'm certain that my work as a coach is only as good as my work with myself, so it's critical that I show up in as much *Vulnerability* as I can muster about my own equity journey. All of my best stories are, after all, about opportunities to learn (which is to say screw-ups), not about shining moments where I stood triumphant atop Woke Mountain (see Appendix D). While those stories are surely not unique to me - the ways in which white people perpetuate inequity are hardly new - I've found they carry much less weight when universalized. There's real power in embracing the Jam practice of speaking from the I when telling my story; while people may well resist universalities - "But that's not true about *me!*" - it's much harder to argue with my own personal experience. While speaking vulnerably and honestly from the I is in part modeling, it's also an unspoken invitation for the practitioners I support to reflect on similar moments in their own life. I hope that by doing so with humor, that reflection does indeed feel invitational, rather than confrontational, as we work to build a container that is truly welcoming and celebratory of every step of our respective equity journeys.

In all honesty, *Humor* would not appear on this list without my phenomenal Capstone Coach Heather Laine Talley's persistent reflection of its role in my work. It's such an integral part of how I show up in the world that I wasn't conscious of its significance until she and others repeatedly pointed it out. Out of that awareness has grown a question of discernment around the interrelation of humor and vulnerability, both positive and

potentially detrimental. Where are the moments when my equity stumbles are appropriate fodder for a humorous anecdote, and where are they invitations to deeper vulnerability and even grief? In either case, vulnerability and humor - like so many of these practices - cannot be codified or guaranteed simply by inclusion in a list of agreements or even aspirations. I must continue to stay in generative inquiry about their role, and the power I have in wielding them as a means towards deepening conversations, rather than avoiding them.

Curiosity Over Certainty and Transparency

In this, the principle of *Curiosity Over Certainty* serves me well, as it does in disrupting the sometimes magnetic pull of *Paternalism* in my work and life. Particularly in the social justice realm, notions of expertism run rampant, resulting in in-fighting, cancel culture, and a deeply ironic reinscription of hierarchy. In order for me to leverage my privilege effectively, I must be able to engage with my fellow white people at any point in their equity journey, offering my gifts and perspective while also recognizing that I am on a lifelong journey of my own. Rather than perpetuating my own form of *Power Hoarding*, by positioning myself as the holder of the "right way" to equity, I embrace *Transparency* in my facilitation and coaching practice, and in my willingness to learn in public.

This is particularly important when working with educators, positioned as they are as the experts in their field, while also engaged in learning and unlearning of their own. The clearer I can be about the facilitation choices I'm making and questions I'm holding, the better they're able to get curious about their own practice and inquiry. To that end, I freely share (perhaps overmuch for some) the rationale behind the agenda choices I make, beginning with intended outcomes and an invitation to adapt or reject outright the means I've suggested to meet them. I'm open about the continuous work necessary to accommodate myriad entrypoints to the work, and am as genuinely enthusiastic as I am

curious about new ways to invite diverse learning styles. That enthusiasm and curiosity extends to understanding where people are on their equity journey. Saying “That hasn’t been my experience, can you help me understand yours?” only rings true if I’ve first been honest about that experience. Working to develop my craft of what SRI’s calls “probing questions” has served me well in this regard, challenging the binary thinking, assumptions, and judgement that can creep unconsciously into inquiry. Critically, as I seek not to replicate my own equity journey, but rather to support practitioners in navigating their own, I appreciate SRI’s reminder that a true probing question isn’t merely “a recommendation with an upward inflection at the end.” (n.d.)

Check-ins and Generous Listening

It’s no easy task to subvert the notions of *Objectivity* and *Individualism* at the heart of so much educator practice - the impulse to close the door, teach your content, and operate outside of community. *Check-ins* are a core practice in slowing down and getting curious about ourselves and others. In the Jam tradition, check-ins are an opportunity to dip a cup in the river of your current experience and share what’s alive for you in this moment. The invitation is not to preplan your share, nor to match the tone or content of any of the check-ins before yours. In fact, if you’d like to use your time to sit quietly (a rare treat indeed!), to move your body, or in any other fashion, that is welcome; it is your time.

There are two roles in check-ins, that of the speaker and that of the listener, both active and both vital. The listener is invited to practice *Generous Listening*, settling fully into the role, neither using the time to plan for their own check-in nor to pick up what is being shared, either as a starting point for offering advice (unless requested) or to connect to their own experience. We are here, as my friend and fellow SRI Affiliate Daniel Baron says, “to listen one another into our deeper understanding.” Breath between check-ins is supportive here

as an invitation to deeper listening, as well as to sit with and dispel the energy of one check-in before moving on to the next. This runs counter to many conventional meeting practices, where “check-ins” are often rushed and cursory, contributing to both a sense of urgency and an unwillingness to engage with the full human person of each participant.

Multiple Modalities and (Other) Voices

Counter to the *Worship of the Written Word* that dominates conventional learning spaces is the invitation of *Multiple Modalities and (Other) Voices*, both in content and in reflection. Content-wise, we’ve experienced such exponential growth in the availability of powerful podcasts and - especially in Covidtimes - webinars that offer access to the work beyond conventional academic texts. The use of poetry to close (and sometimes open) each meeting - inviting those voices literally whenever recordings of authors reading their work are available - offered a different rhythm and unconventional opportunity for reflection. Practitioners and coaches themselves were invited to embrace whatever modality called to them in reflections of their own, borrowing the Jam prompt to offer “a word, a sound, or a movement” as a check-in or -out.

Systems Thinking and Emergence

So much of this foundational work is about uprooting *Either/Or Thinking* and the many binaries that prevent an embrace of the complexity at the heart of equity work. Practitioners can become so mired in good/bad and right/wrong that the work becomes flattened, obscuring the nuance from which possibility is born. Both *Systems Thinking* and *Emergence* help to trouble the binary, inviting deeper understanding of intersectionality in the inequities we recognize, and the fractal nature of change brought about by the smallest inequities we seek to rectify.

In his forthcoming book, Dr. Shawn Ginwright frames a series of pivots in our thinking and language around equity work, shared in his 2020 SRI Summer Virtual Meeting keynote. He first tackles the common parlance of an “equity lens” - a metaphor that’s always felt inadequate to me - instead offering the idea of an equity *mirror*. In this new conception, practitioners don’t simply recognize inequity discreetly in the personal, interpersonal, or systemic spheres, but rather understand inequity in any of those spheres to be a reflection of inequity across them. In a fractal understanding of change, we can then appreciate shifts in any of those spheres to be mirrored throughout the other, further deepening both impact and resonance.

Invitation with Reflection, The Zones of Comfort, Stretch, & Panic and The Compass of Reactions

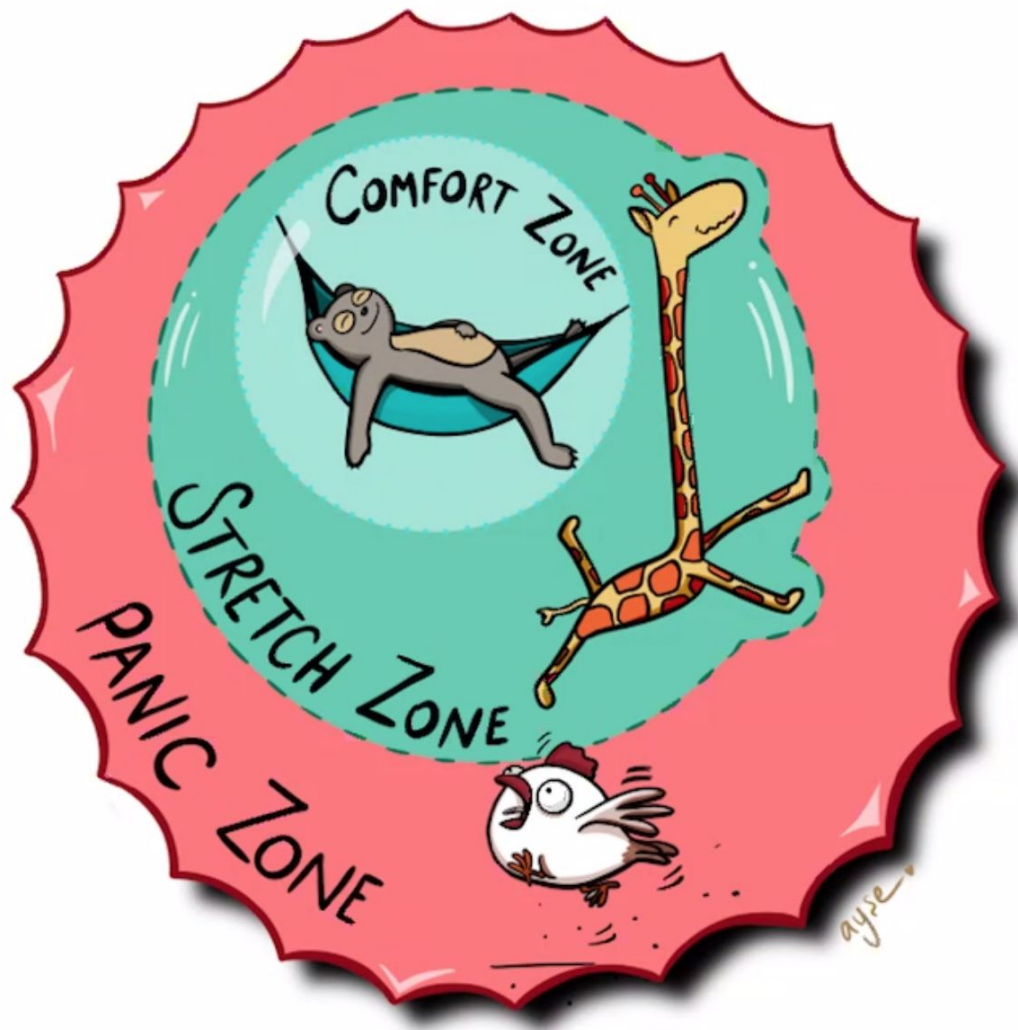
As in a Jam, all participation in this work is invitational, with practitioners welcome to opt out at any time. However, with the characteristic of *Right to Comfort* in mind, this particular “challenge by choice” is framed as *Invitation with Reflection*, with practitioners further invited to interrogate the resistance they’re experiencing. This reflection, and addressing the *Fear of Open Conflict* that can accompany it, are supported by Jam frameworks of *The Zones of Comfort, Stretch, & Panic* and *The Compass of Reactions* (Appendix G). The characteristics of white supremacy culture can be so deeply ingrained in me, and so normalized in my communities, that even to recognize when I’m in Panic can be a revelation. The work of naming - let alone embodying - the strategies necessary to pull me back into Stretch is an ongoing process, made all the more powerful and effective when explored in a space of shared learning and growth.

Frameworks

Embracing any one of these practices in the face of white supremacy culture's dominance requires active engagement with the Stretch zone and, ultimately, a reckoning with the nonlinearity of transformation. In order to sustain an inquiry into my complicity in white supremacy culture, I must continually grapple with its insistence that *Progress is Bigger, More*. Bobbie Harro's "*Cycle of Liberation*" (2013, Appendix H) offers both a compelling visual reminder and a quick (if dense) shorthand of "progress" that is by its very nature iterative. (For a potent metaphorical equivalent, see The Spiral Mountain in Metaphors, Appendix D.) While Janet Helms' "*White Racial Identity Development Model*" (1995) offers a helpful framing of the stages of an exploration of white identity, its formatting implies a unidirectional development; when paired with Harro's Cycle, it, too, can be better understood as nonlinear. The "Critical Incident That Creates Cognitive Dissonance" (Harro, 2013) might well emerge unbidden from my own thoughts, inviting me to reflect on where in Helms' model I find myself in any given moment.

While the constant vigilance required of this work can seem daunting, it is only commensurate with the ubiquity of white supremacy and, more importantly, can never match the vigilance required of Black, Indigenous, People of Color to survive - let alone thrive - in this country. The efforts discussed herein may seem miniscule by comparison, but, particularly when magnified through the lens of privilege, can begin to build the culture necessary to create and sustain lasting change.

APPENDIX G: The Zones of Comfort, Stretch, & Panic and The Compass of Reactions

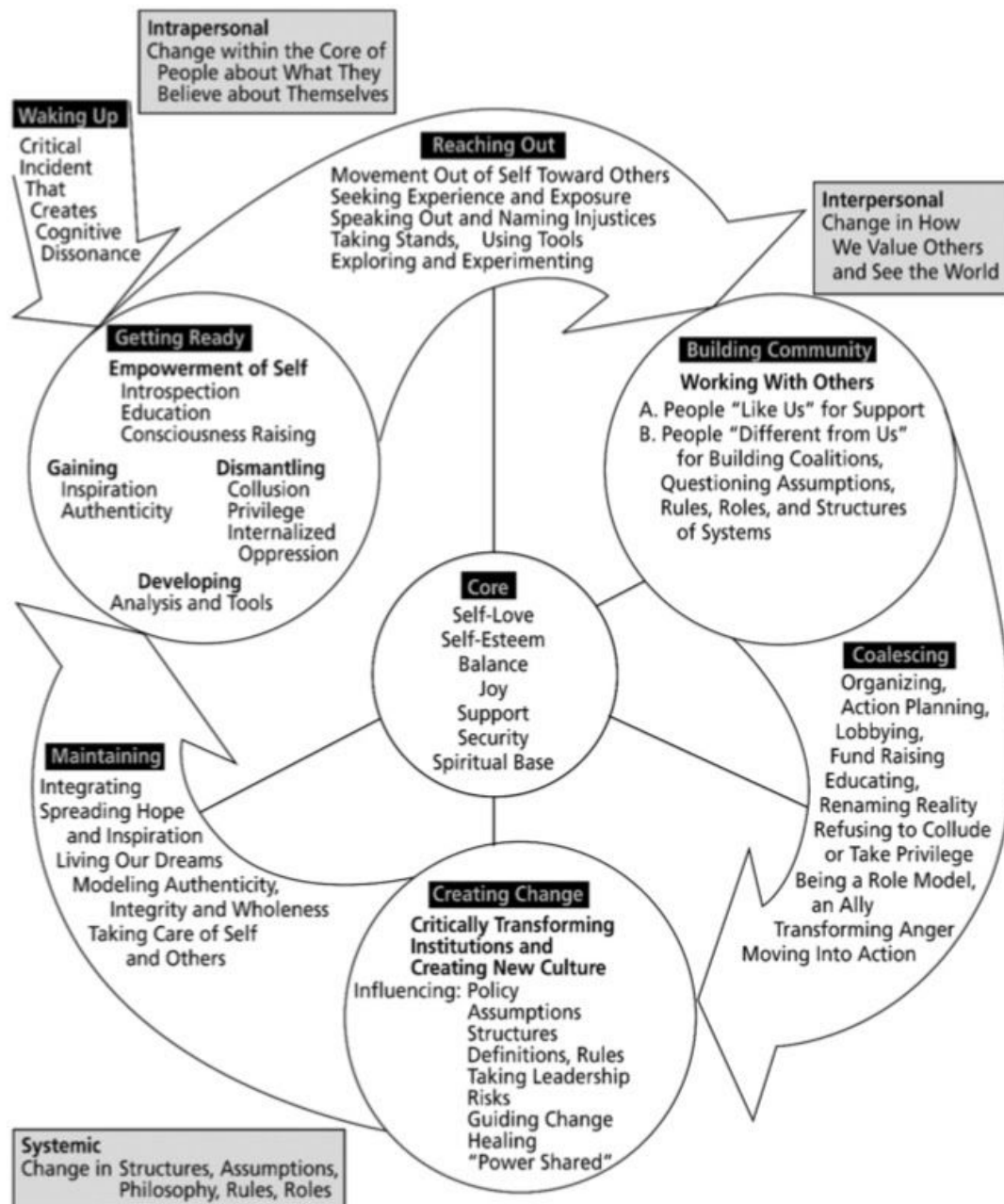


Both the School Reform Initiative and YES! Jams use the Zones of Comfort, Stretch (Risk), and Panic (Danger) as a means to self-monitor and cultivate the conditions for learning and transformation to occur. My ability to recognize when I'm in Panic is most helpful when I'm also able to name what might help me move out of Panic into Stretch. SRI uses a physical representation of the Zones (usually ropes on the ground), offering a variety of scenarios and asking participants to move to which Zone they'd land in, should that scenario arise. They're then asked to name - out loud or to themselves - what supports might help them move one Zone closer to Comfort.

At a Jam, the introduction of Zones is followed by an introduction to the Compass of Reactions, also made visible in a physical representation of the Compass Points. The Compass refers to how we react when we find ourselves in Panic, with a repeated reminder that we are not our Compass Reaction, no matter how frequently we may begin to recognize its appearance in our lives. The Compass is composed of two axes, the Fight Axis and the Flight Axis. In Fight, we may find ourselves in Attack Self or Attack Other(s) and in Flight, Withdrawal or Avoidance. Withdrawal may be a physical retreat from the situation, or merely shutting down internally while still remaining present. Avoidance can look like any number of distractions from the Panic-inducing situation, ranging from scrolling Instagram to furiously completing more seemingly productive tasks.

For Practitioners and Coaches - starting with myself! - these twinned resources can be helpful in navigating the stickiest parts of our equity journey, even under the best of circumstances. The onset of a global pandemic three-quarters of the way through the school year threw so many of us into a state of perpetual Panic, and it was invaluable for me to be able to return to these tools as a means of locating both myself and the folks I support in our Reactions. Already a critical piece of my self-work, the Zones and Compass have been central to this Capstone's exploration of internal conditions necessary to do equity work.

Cycle of Liberation



Source: Developed by Bobbie Harro

© Readings for Diversity and Social Justice, Routledge, 2000

APPENDIX I: Resource List

- [Why Land Acknowledgments Matter](#) by Chip Colwell
- [Pronouns: A Resource](#) from GLSEN (formerly the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network)
- Southern Poverty Law Center's [Speak Up: Responding to Everyday Bigotry](#) (including Six Steps to Speaking Up Against Everyday Bigotry)
- Harvard's Project Implicit [Implicit Association Test](#) (in 15 different identities)
- [Scaffolded list of anti-racism resources for white folks](#)
- [What White Children Need to Know About Race](#) by Ali Michael & Eleonora Bartoli
- [Whose Culture Has Capital](#) by Tara J. Yosso
- Helpful [Funds of Knowledge framework & additional references](#) from Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
- [Student intervention for anti-racist education](#) by Life LeGeros
- [Voices for Vermont's Children](#) KIDS COUNT Data Books and Education Matters: The Impacts of Systemic Equity in Vermont 2016
- Janet Helms' [White Racial Identity Development Model](#)
- Barnor Hesse's [8 White Identities](#)
- [Interrupting Bias: Calling Out vs. Calling In](#) via VT NEA and Seed the Way
- Kenneth Jones & Tema Okun's [The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture](#)
- [White Dominant Culture & Something Different: a worksheet](#)
- 1619 Project & Podcast

Videos

- [Understanding My Privilege](#), Sue Borrigo, TEDxPasadenaWomen
- [Deconstructing White Privilege with Dr. Robin DiAngelo](#) (recommended to watch at .75 speed - she's a fast talker!)

- [SRI 2019 Fall Meeting Closing Keynote by Ijeoma Oluo](#)

Voices

- Resmaa Menakem on On Being, [“Notice the Rage; Notice the Silence”](#)
- [Seeing White](#) podcast series from Scene On Radio

Books

- Leadership and the New Science by Margaret Wheatley
- Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- How to Be an Anti-Racist by Ibram X. Kendi

Closing Poems

- Spell for Grief or Letting Go by adrienne maree brown
- To the Fig Tree on 9th and Christian by Ross Gay
- Remember by Joy Harjo
- Perhaps the World Ends Here - Joy Harjo
- Keeping Quiet by Pablo Neruda
- Grief and Praise (song) by Osprey Flies the Nest
- Blessing in the Chaos by Jan Richardson
- Urgency by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

APPENDIX J: Coaching Entrepreneurs for Equity Project

In the uprising(s) following George Floyd's murder, I fielded a flurry of inquiries from my white friends, curious about how they might better understand their place in the national conversation about race. While they may have been aware of my work for years, in many cases this was the first time we'd discussed white supremacy as something of relevance to their lives and not simply as impactful on the lives of people of color. My inquiry into the internal conditions necessary to help me hold this work served me well in these moments - as it did with my practitioners in the wake of school closure - enabling me to step fully into my responsibility to engage with fellow white people wherever they might find themselves in relation to whiteness, be it in grief, anger, frustration, or confusion.

One of the most unexpected outcomes of this project grew from ongoing conversations with one of my most beloveds, Allison Davis, an extraordinary coach in her own right, albeit in the realm of sales. Having long compared notes about the similarities between our respective practices - all the more curious, given their wildly different contexts - we began to explore together how my offerings might serve the needs emerging for her clients and peers. In the last months of my Capstone, national and worldwide uprisings in defense of Black lives called many white folks to action for the first time. Allison was tracking both my work in the world and the explosion of racial awareness reverberating through her field, and saw great potential for me to be of service. As a result, we began collaboratively exploring what it looks like to expand the work of embodying equitable practice beyond the educational realm.

Below are some very preliminary thoughts on what the shape of that work might be. My hunch is that solo entrepreneurs experience the same tension school leaders do between

the slowness needed to facilitate learning and the speed with which they're accustomed to acting. The impulse to start and stay product-oriented (in itself an expression of white supremacy culture) may be hard to resist, so it's important to encourage a more holistic view, embracing the internal work necessary to create the conditions for those products to be meaningful and sustainable. Informed by Bobbie Harro's "Cycle of Liberation" (Appendix G), I think of this work as cyclical, moving through each of these realms in whatever way you're called.

Personal Identity Work

Understanding & growing my understanding of the identities I hold

- Dominant & Marginalized Identities
- The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture & Something Different
- White Fragility

Interpersonal Identity Work

Building capacity to leverage my privilege to hold space for marginalized clients & other fellow humans

- Addressing bias incidents
- Calling In/Calling Out, *Being Called In/Out*
- Cultivating Brave Spaces

Organizational Identity Work

Articulating an organizational commitment to & manifestation of antiracism

- Crafting Equity Statements, Equity Lenses, and Inclusion Riders

- Applying an equity lens to thought leadership opportunities (podcasts, speaking events, panels, etc.) and vendors, discerning how public (or not) to make these criteria.
- Exploring scholarships and sliding scales for BIPOC - how can we do this in integrity and without being a white savior?

My Offerings/Approach (see also My Commitments as a Facilitator & Coach [Appendix A])

- Facilitation & protocols to support reflection on any materials you're finding/are finding you
- Facilitation & protocols to collectively explore & generate solutions to individual dilemmas
- Confidential, individual coaching as-needed

APPENDIX K: Acknowledgements

I am forever grateful...

First and foremost, to Holly Wilkinson, and all of the Coaches and Practitioners who invited me so wholeheartedly (pun intended!) to share in this grand learning experience!

To Shilpa Jain, Austin Willacy, and my whole global Jamily - especially in the hard times, especially in celebration - with extra special appreciation for the unflagging care of Vivian Stein, always there to hold my hand (metaphorically and physically) at the intersection of the Personal, Interpersonal, and Systemic. The Jam is truly always on!

To my sister in all ways but blood, Allison Davis, for never failing to see and remind me of my highest possible self and purpose, and for bringing all of her magic to bear on making that possibility a reality.

To Shadiin Garcia and Sarika Tandon, among so many facilitator-colleague/mentors who have welcomed me into the sphere of their revolutionary practice.

To my superlative Anchor (and Mirror) Coach Heather Laine Talley for her steady presence, genuine enthusiasm, and for so many nourishing morsels of reflection and encouragement.

To N'Dakina, place of my birth, land that I love, and all of the birds, butterflies, chipmunks, doggos, and kitties who kept me company in this writing.

And of course to my parents, who've indulged (slash endured) my radical notions for far longer than anyone else on the planet, whether or not they've been able at any point to explain to their friends what the heck it is I'm doing exactly.

Having completed my Capstone in the astonishing year of 2020, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the impact of Coronavirus on every aspect of this study and my being. In the midst of so much uncertainty, devastation, and grief, Covidtimes has also offered such gifts. We've found ourselves in each other's homes and lives in such breathtaking vulnerability, faced with the deeply humanizing opportunity of a globally-shared experience. In the Jam spirit of welcome and offering, our needs and our capacity to meet the needs of others have never been on starker display. The worries and wonderings we might once have kept private are now shared collectively, exposing our interdependence in at times literally visceral ways. At the same time, the care we might once have reserved for our most beloveds, we've now been asked to extend to *all* of our fellow humans.

Through it all, I've lost so much hope, while at the same time gaining so much trust. I'm buoyed up each day by every act of solidarity - from the most hyperlocal mutual aid efforts to the rising global movement for Black lives and the rematriation of Indigenous lands - clear manifestations of "the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible" (thank you, Charles Eisenstein!). In some ways, I don't need to have hope for what's possible, merely the deepest of appreciation for all those already making those possibilities our reality.